

Eating Right Today: Tips for Asian Americans

As an Asian American, you know there's a strong connection between eating right, feeling well and staying healthy. Traditional Asian diets vary by country and region, but are generally characterized by healthful eating patterns that are low in fat and abundant in fish, vegetables, fruit and tea. But when East meets West, and Asians adopt American eating habits, they may also begin to experience American health concerns.

Like other Americans, Asian Americans are at risk for health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, some types of cancer and type 2 diabetes. But you can do much to stay healthy by eating right and being physically active. The tips below can help.



Quick Veggie & Beef Noodle Bowl

♦ **Eat fish at least twice a week, especially fatty fish such as salmon, lake trout, tuna and herring.** These fish contain omega-3 fatty acids, which may help reduce risk for heart disease. Try baking, broiling, grilling or steaming fish, instead of frying it, to limit added fat. Tip: When your favorite fresh fish is on sale, buy extra, wrap well and freeze to use another time.

♦ **Sip your tea.** Some very early research suggests tea may have some benefits beyond its pleasing taste.

Watch Your Weight

Being overweight increases your risk for certain cancers, heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Balancing your calories with physical activity is key to a healthy weight.

♦ **Keep an eye on portion sizes.** Even though Asian diets are generally healthful, it's important to keep the amount of food you eat in line with your calorie needs. Over time, eating more food (and getting more calories) than you need may result in unwanted weight gain.

♦ **Eat fats, oils and sweets in small amounts or less often.** These foods add flavor, but also add calories to your diet. Another option: try some sugar-free or low-calorie versions of favorite treats such as puddings, gelatin or candy.

♦ **Choose fruit for dessert and snacks.** You'll get vitamins, minerals and fiber for a modest number of calories. Melons, apples, oranges, pears, mangoes, bananas, papayas, grapes, kiwis, cherries and pineapple are delicious options.

♦ **Be active!** Adults need *at least* 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most (preferably all) days of the week. Children need *at least* 60 minutes a day, including active play. And it's OK to break up your activity into 10- or 15-minute periods of time. Try walking or bicycling to your destination. Add variety by doing Tai Chi, martial arts, stretching or yoga.

Practice Positive Eating

For good health, what you eat can be very important.

♦ **Enjoy whole grains.** They provide vitamins, minerals and fiber, and may help reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes. Experts recommend eating at least three servings of whole grains each day. Examples of one Food Pyramid serving are ½ cup of cooked soba noodles or bulgur wheat, 1 cup of ready-to-eat whole-grain cereal, 1 slice of whole wheat bread or 4 to 6 whole-grain crackers. Tip: Look for packets of whole grains in your Asian market and add some into your rice cooker along with white rice for flavor and texture. Try serving brown rice, instead of white rice, in two meals a week.

♦ **Include plenty of vegetables in stir-fries.** Use bok choy or other leafy greens, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, mushrooms (oyster, shitake, white button), pea-pods and zucchini. These versatile vegetables add color, nutrients and fiber to meals.

♦ **“Green up” your soups by adding lots of kale, spinach, mustard greens or turnip greens.** Tip: Try frozen greens. They're ready to use and nutritious because they're processed at peak freshness.

A Special Word about Strong Bones

Asian Americans are at higher risk for the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. Many may not get enough calcium for strong bones because they have trouble digesting lactose, a natural sugar found in calcium-rich dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cheese. If you avoid dairy products for this reason, try these tips:

- ◆ Include plenty of calcium containing foods in your diet such as soybeans, tofu (processed with calcium), kale, bok choy, turnip and mustard greens, broccoli, almonds, figs, canned sardines and salmon with small bones, and calcium-fortified soy milk, orange juice and cereals.

- ◆ Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. Most milk is fortified with vitamin D. Other sources include canned salmon with bones, egg yolks and vitamin D-fortified cereals. Another option is sunlight; if you spend about 10 minutes per day in the sun, your body can produce vitamin D.

- ◆ Try eating or drinking dairy products in small amounts throughout the day. They may be easier to digest.

- ◆ Ask your doctor or registered dietitian whether you need a calcium or vitamin D supplement.

Shake the Sodium Habit

For some people, eating too much sodium increases risk for high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease or stroke. Sodium is found in table salt, some processed and canned foods and in many traditional Asian foods and ingredients such as salted fish, fish paste, pickled vegetables, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, monosodium glutamate (MSG), oyster sauce and shrimp paste.

- ◆ Buy fresh or plain frozen meats, poultry, fish and vegetables instead of canned, pickled, preserved or salted versions.

- ◆ Try “light” or reduced sodium versions of sauces, condiments and canned broths.

- ◆ Perk up flavor with ingredients and spices such as ginger, garlic, scallions, chili peppers, lemon or lime juice, basil, cilantro, coriander, lemon grass and cumin.

Trim the Saturated Fat (and Cholesterol)

To promote heart health, cut down on saturated fat and cholesterol.

- ◆ Choose lean cuts of beef and pork (those with “loin” or “round” in the name are good choices). Trim off visible fat from meat and remove skin from poultry before eating. When making soup with meat or poultry, skim off the fat before serving.

- ◆ Make protein-rich plant foods such as tofu, soy beans, chickpeas, lentils, lima beans and kidney beans a frequent part of your meals.

- ◆ Steam, grill, roast, boil or stir fry foods in a small amount of oil instead of frying.

- ◆ Cook with corn, peanut or canola oil instead of lard or chicken fat.

- ◆ Use “light” coconut milk in recipes.

- ◆ Go easy on egg yolks, which are high in cholesterol. Limit yolks to three to five per week. Try egg whites or egg substitutes in recipes, instead.

Here are two delicious dishes you may want to prepare for your family.

Quick Veggie & Beef Noodle Bowl
Prep: 10 minutes

Cook: 15 minutes

- 4 oz. angel hair pasta, uncooked
- 1/4 cup KRAFT LIGHT DONE RIGHT! CATALINA Reduced Fat Dressing
- 1 boneless beef sirloin steak (1 lb.), cut into thin strips
- 2 cups *each*: sliced carrots, broccoli, bok choy and red peppers
- 1 can (14-1/2 oz.) low sodium beef broth
- 1 tsp. *each*: ground ginger and garlic powder

COOK pasta as directed on package.

MEANWHILE, heat dressing in large skillet. Add steak, carrots and broccoli; cook and stir 5 to 7 min. or until steak is cooked through. Add bok choy, peppers, broth and seasonings; stir. Cook until heated through, stirring occasionally.

DRAIN pasta; place on large serving platter. Top with the steak mixture.

Makes 4 servings, about 2-1/4 cups each.

Substitute: Prepare as directed, substituting a 20-oz. bag of frozen stir-fry blend vegetables for the sliced fresh vegetables. Add vegetables with the broth and simmer 5 min. or until heated through.

Nutrition Bonus: Add color to your day with this low-calorie, low-fat meal. The bright orange carrots are an excellent source of vitamin A and the red peppers are rich in vitamin C.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 360 calories, 8g total fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 60mg cholesterol, 410mg sodium, 42g carbohydrate, 6g dietary fiber, 13g sugars, 28g protein, 240%DV vitamin A, 170%DV vitamin C, 10%DV calcium, 25%DV iron.

Exchange: 1-1/2 Starch, 3 Vegetable, 2 Meat (L), 1 Fat

Nutty Pineapple-Tofu Fried Rice
Prep: 15 minutes plus marinating

Cook: 10 minutes

- 1/4 cup lite soy sauce
- 8 oz. firm tofu, cubed
- 1 tbsp. PLANTERS Peanut Oil
- 1 medium red pepper, cut into strips (about 1-1/2 cups)
- 1 tsp. *each*: grated ginger and crushed garlic
- 1/2 cup cut-up green onion (1-inch lengths)
- 2 cups instant brown rice, cooked, chilled
- 1 can (8 oz.) pineapple tidbits in juice, drained
- 1 bag (2 oz.) PLANTERS Sliced Almonds, toasted (about 1/3 cup)

POUR soy sauce over tofu in shallow dish. Refrigerate 5 to 10 min. to marinate. Drain tofu, reserving soy sauce.

HEAT oil in large nonstick skillet on medium-high heat. Add tofu; cook 3 to 4 min. or until golden brown on all sides, stirring occasionally. Remove from skillet.

ADD peppers, ginger and garlic to skillet; cook and stir 2 min. Add onions; cook and stir 1 min. Add rice and pineapple; mix lightly. Cook 2 to 3 min. or until heated through, stirring frequently. Add tofu and reserved soy sauce; mix lightly. Cook until heated through, stirring occasionally. Sprinkle with the almonds just before serving.

Makes 4 servings, 2 cups each.

Nutrition Bonus: Enjoy this low-calorie, meatless alternative to take-out. The red pepper is rich in vitamin C and provides vitamin A.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 380 calories, 15g total fat, 2g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 340mg sodium, 51g carbohydrate, 6g dietary fiber, 9g sugars, 13g protein, 40%DV vitamin A, 100%DV vitamin C, 15%DV calcium, 15%DV iron.

Exchange: 3 Starch, 1 Meat (L), 2 Fat

Dietary Exchanges based on *Exchange Lists for Meal Planning* © 2003 by the American Diabetes Association and the American Dietetic Association